SECRETARY JOHANNS: Please join me in welcoming a man who is creating a legacy far beyond the music world as a wise steward of our natural resources in a voice for conservation. Ladies and gentlemen, join me in welcoming Mr. Chuck Leavell.

MR. LEAVELL: All right. Thank you so much. How wonderful to be here. Thank you. This is absolutely a big thrill and thank you, Secretary Johanns for those wonderful remarks. May I take this opportunity to say that we just met shortly before this event tonight and we've only exchanged a few words between us, but I think it's safe to say that we've become instant friends and we share the same passions, the same love of the land.

I just want to say on behalf of everybody here, I know you're relatively new to your job but you're already done some great things and we all look forward to the great things that we know you are going to accomplish in your tenure here. So thank you very much.

I have to tell you. Yes, indeed, I was in Ottawa last night. My wife, Rose Lane and I, and we played to a wonderful crowd of 40,000 people there. The last time the band was in Ottawa, Canada, was in 1965. So there were some very anxious Rolling Stones fans there.

And I have to tell you that I barely made this by the hair of my chinny-chinny chin because a couple days ago unbeknownst to me, I was approached and told that the Rolling Stones were going to shoot a video today. So as we speak, the band is shooting a video and of course, I was invited to be there and I was very grateful for that, but I had to go to Mick and say, "Look man. You know I have this little gig down here in St. Louis and what do you think? Can you let me off for the day?" So he graciously allowed me to do that. Thank heavens. So here I am.

Let me say that there is no place in the world I would rather be than right here right now because this is such an important conference and such a great opportunity. I'm glad to be at this conference in my capacity as a private forest land owner. My wife, Rose Lane, and I own and manage what we call Charlane Plantation in Twiggs County, Georgia, right in the heart of Georgia and when I'm not doing that, as you know I do get to play music, sometimes my own music for my own projects and as we know, currently on tour with the Rolling Stones and sometimes with other rock-n-roll bands.

And it's nice to have these two day jobs. When I'm not playing music, I'm fortunate enough to be there at Charlane Plantation and get my hands dirty and ride that

tractor and get out in the woods and do the work that I so much love and have a passion for. That together with my family constitutes the three great passions of my life.

I was just a teenager when I moved to Macon, Georgia, from Alabama to hook up with a record label there called Capricorn Records and my wife, future wife-to-be, Rose Lane, was working there as well. Not long after that, we met. I finally got up the courage to ask for a date when I had joined the Allman Brothers Band and she surprising to me accepted and very soon we fell in love and we were married back in 1973.

Now if I may, I'll take just a moment to introduce my better two-thirds. She's with us here tonight in the front row. Rose Lane, would you stand up? There's my long-legged good looking thing. Thank you.

Now as you can imagine, the long-haired hippy boy has been dating the farmer's daughter and at some point, the long-haired hippy boy has to go meet the farmer and the family. You can imagine. I was the most nervous man on the planet that day. I even went to Rose Lane and I said, "What do you think?" I had hair down to my shoulders then. I said, "What do you think? Should I cut my hair and shave my beard? I don't know." I was all nervous. She said, "No, honey. Just be yourself. Everything's going to be fine."

I have to tell you a quick story about that. Actually I learned years later than her father, Mr. Al, before I got there had gathered all the boys together and all the guys and they said, "Now listen. Rose Lane is bringing a boy out here and I guess they've been seeing each other for a while and I understand he's a little different. He plays in a band and it's not a country band. As a matter of fact, it's a rock band and yes, I hear he has long hair and a beard and maybe a tattoo or something. I don't know. But apparently, they've been seeing each other quite a lot here and they're getting kind of serious. So I don't want you all making fun of him."

And in truth, all of my nervousness was put to rest when I met the family. They were so wonderful to me from day one and so gracious and it's been that way all these years and I am so grateful. As a matter of fact, 32 years, Rose Lane and I celebrated our 32nd anniversary this year and that's not too bad for rock-n-roll, is it? All right.

Rose Lane's family has tended forest land for several generations in Twiggs County. Today *it falls to us and to our children to take care of that land and to try

to leave it in better shape than we found it.

Stewardship of family-owned forest land has always been the cornerstone of conservation in the South. Unfortunately, it's getting harder and harder every year for Southerners to hang onto their forest lands and to the traditions and the values that go along with that wonderful way of life.

Most than one million acres of rural southern forest land is converted for development annually. One million acres, that's a staggering figure. Most of it is family-owned forest land. Some owners want to sell and that's fine as it should be. But others would rather keep their forest working and their rural communities and values whole.

But they find that deck increasingly stacked against them. I call this situation the South's invisible forest health crisis. Secretary Johanns talked about some of the other challenges that we face in terms of disease and insects and others. But this is a different kind of challenge, the invisible forest health crisis of the South.

Many forest owners don't see a way to preserve their family's heritage of voluntary private stewardship. If we don't find a way to solve it, the Forest Service predicts we can lose another 20 to 25 million acres over the next few decades. And the fact is most families don't own forest just for the money. Pride and pleasure comes first and a profit on timber falls much farther down the line.

But even the most conservation-minded owner of forest land needs cash, needs cash for taxes, cash for insurance and cash to invest in the future of their forest land. Markets for wood today as we know are sluggish and near nonexistent for lower value trees. Land prices and taxes are high and getting higher and higher as cities and towns grow closer to those of us that live in the woods.

And this crisis backs me and many of my fellow southern land owners right into a corner. You know our timber crop is a valuable crop in the South. We support over 770,000 direct jobs and about $120 billion in total industry output. We are the backbone of so many of these communities.

Just as important, our city neighbors prize the environmental goods that we produce, clean air, clean water, healthy wildlife. Public values and public policy towards family forest owners are based on a paradox, it sometimes seems to me, that the land can sustain itself without cash flow and that vital public goods can be

produced without investment. It ain't happening. Trust me.

So what do we do about it? Well, certainly a conference like this where we bring great minds together to discuss these issues and to find solution is an absolutely fabulous start. So let me throw a few ideas your way. But rather just stand up here and preach to you, let me illustrate this by telling you a story about a cousin of Rose Lane's and I enjoyed so much Secretary Johann's talk about dogs and I think we probably share that as well. I have about 20 or 25 bird dogs back home. So I'm going to tell a little dog story for you now.

Our main character in this story was a cousin of Rose Lane's, a fabulous guy named Baby Joe Fock (PH). Baby Joe is deceased now but he was just a real character down there where we live in Georgia. He was about my height but he probably made three of me. He must have weighed close to 300 pounds and he had a big old deep voice like this and he had a moon pie face with a beautiful smile. His eyes would twinkle and Baby Joe always had a cigar with him. He would rarely smoke the thing and he had lost three of his fingers in a hunting accident and so he would hold that cigar between his thumb and his little finger and every now and then he'd light it up but mostly, he just put it in and out of his mouth.

Now as you can imagine, coon hunting is a big sport down there where I come from in the back woods of Georgia, and Baby Joe happened to be the president of the Coon Hunting Club there in Twiggs County. So there was going to be this big hunt that was a contest of the dogs to see who had the best dog, a field trial. Baby Joe being the president got there to the camp early and he sat next to this big old oak tree there and he was watching everybody as they were coming in, all the hunters bringing their dogs.

Now the other character in our story here is a buddy of mine named Ferrell Kitchens. Now Ferrell is about my age and like me he loves the outdoors and also like me he loves gadgets and gizmos. Now Ferrell is going out and he's bought him a new dog and along with the dog that he's bought, he's bought some paraphernalia to go along with it. He's bought him a training collar and he's bought him a tracking collar in case the dog runs off and gets lost so he can find him and he has a brand new truck that he just bought.

So Ferrell pulls up in his truck and he gets out and he goes back and he gets his dog out, a brand new

dog, and then he reaches in the truck and he puts that training collar on. The dog has an antenna sticking up here like this and he gets that tracking collar, puts that thing on. It has two more antenna sticking out. By now, the dog looks like Sputnik. He's ready to take off for orbit.

Of course, Baby Joe is watching all this and then, of course, there's all the controls that go along with these devices. So he reaches into the truck and he pulls out the control for the training collar. He pulls out this thing that goes along with the tracking collar that looks like a TV antenna and he has all this stuff in his hand. He has a rope on the dog. The dog is pulling him and he's getting up to the camp with all this stuff.

Baby Joe has been watching him. So when Ferrell gets up there to Baby Joe, he says, "Hey, Baby Joe. How you doin' man? I'm just excited about the hunt. I bought me a new dog. Lookey here. Tell me what you think about it." And Baby Joe took that cigar out of his mouth and he said, "Ferrell, I'll tell you what I think. I think you should have just took all that money and bought you a good dog."

That's so great. I love that story. It takes me back to my roots and it carries a message that has a lot of meaning, I think, for all of us. Sometimes we want to do the trendy thing. Sometimes we want to do the exciting thing or the easiest thing when it might not be the right thing or the most commonsensical thing.

And I think Baby Joe is absolutely right. If the dog won't hunt, let's find one that will. That's one reason why I think the Healthy Forest Initiative along with the 2002 Farm Bill is so promising because it represents an important step towards sound and sensible forest policy.

I've asked myself many times what Baby Joe would say about our current situation with our southern forests. I think he would tell us to start with the fundamentals and work up from there. So here's a few things to think about.

First, support markets. Above all, keep our domestic industry competitive and not just traditional markets but we need to look for new markets, for new wood-based products;

Second, recognize that wood is not the only product that we produce. Carbon credits and wetlands mitigations that Secretary Johanns mentioned earlier are just two ways to generate some cash flows so that family forest land owners can stay on the land;

Third, be sparing with rules and regulations. Most tree farmers are in the business for much more than the business and if you make it too hard for us to keep going, I know that a lot of my fellow forest land owners will struggle their shoulders, throw their hands up and just give up;

Fourth, this is so very important. Don't design a solution without talking to us. Come and see us. We love company and we love to talk about our forest land and we love to talk about our families. So once a while come and walk amongst us. I think a lot of us can tell you what we think will work and what we think won't work and you certainly have nothing to lose by listening to us; and

Fifth, be open to new thinking about what works and what doesn't work. You know the South is changing. Our country is changing but it's definitely changing in the South. Solutions that work for us may not work for our children. The stewards of our tax dollars, I hope that the Administration and Congress will take a careful and strategic look at what sort of investments we need to make for the future so that we can address the forests, this South's invisible forest health crisis.

I do sense that we probably all agree on one all-important principle and that is this. As a society, we need to give family forest land owners more choices, not fewer. We need to create choices that make sense for them, choices that will let them preserve and pass on their heritage of family stewardship. If we offer these good commonsensible choices and if we educate people about them and make them economically feasible, then I'm absolutely confident that the southern forest will prosper because the power of private stewardship simply cannot be matched.

Thank you all so very much. It's been a pleasure to be with you. God bless.